

## **Students rightly focus on climate crisis rather than Trudeau photos**

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### **Body**

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Standing in front of Calgary City Hall in the middle of hundreds of teens, younger kids and adults chanting for action on the climate crisis, I wondered if the photos of Justin Trudeau posing as a very dark-faced Aladdin mattered to them at all.

The demonstration went on for hours and, while it was large by Calgary standards, it was small compared to the thousands who thronged the streets in New York, Sydney and Hamburg. Students in India, Chile, South Africa and Ukraine also took to the streets in peaceful protest.

The demonstrations were spurred by Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg, who has turned her personal quest to get politicians to take the climate crisis much more seriously into a worldwide movement.

The timing of the young eco warrior's latest push for a global uprising of young people was tailor-made for the Liberal, Green and NDP leaders as they slog their way through our federal election campaign.

After all, several surveys and polls cite concern about climate change as among the top three priorities for Canadian voters.

The Liberals, the Greens and the NDP all have detailed platforms regarding action on climate change. Some of those plans will be difficult to achieve; others are too weak given the enormity of the problem.

But it's clear those three parties recognize the climate crisis as serious enough to warrant a lot of their political capital.

Vigorous student demonstrations during an election campaign can't help but drive home those parties' messages on climate change. Green Leader Elizabeth May certainly understood that when she decided to attend the Calgary rally. What better place for her to be than in Canada's oil capital surrounded by students amplifying her message?

But given the Trudeau brown/black face revelations last week, the timing didn't work out that well for the Liberal leader.

Instead of revelling in a global uprising of young people echoing one of his signature causes, he was forced to deal with reporters and commentators obsessed with the photos of him pretending to be black or brown skinned, and looking foolish to say the least.

Of course, people took offence, especially people of colour who are often subjected to demeaning, repetitive remarks and behaviour because of their race.

As Calgary Mayor Naheed Nenshi said: "I felt sucker punched."

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The news media became obsessed in a matter of seconds.

It's an easy story to cover, to get people to comment on and, of course, there were photos.

No further explanation needed - we gotcha!

That such a story is easier to cover and opine on than the climate crisis and what might be done to slow it, adapt to it, and pay for it, goes without saying.

And yet in a few years time what will be more significant? The photos of a blackfaced Trudeau or photos of melting ice sheets, or raging forest fires, or dead whales?

The timing of the release of the Trudeau photos through a U.S. magazine - Time - only a few days before a global push by students and the United Nations to draw attention to the climate crisis raises some interesting questions. Why were scandalous photos of one of West's most ardent apostles of carbon reduction revealed then? Was it important to the people who turned over the photo to diminish Trudeau's stature internationally and therefore his influence on climate change matters?

Trudeau's not perfect by any means. But then who is? And he certainly needed to apologize, quickly, forcefully and sincerely.

But I would be willing to bet that those students demonstrating last Friday for action on climate change were quick to forgive him so they could get back to what really matters to them.

After every election I can remember, there is always regret expressed about the low number of young people who get involved or bother to vote.

Most of the students demonstrating around the world on Friday are too young to vote now. But they won't always be too young.

Soon their votes will count and by then they may well have influenced thousands of others that the climate crisis is the issue of our time.

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